

19 JULY 1974

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Approved For Release 2004/10/28 : CIA-RDP88-01314R000300450009-5

Citizen Forum

Canada a tool of the CIA

By John Starnes

Recently CBC TV and Maclean's Magazine featured stories to the effect that Canada is a tool of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and that such efforts as we make to protect ourselves against threats and potential threats to our national unity and security somehow are sinister, undesirable and in the interests of others. The claim also was made that these efforts are outside the control of the government.

The stories are a hodge-podge of fact, half-fact and sheer fantasy. Indeed, some of the allegations are so exaggerated that one wonders about the motives of the authors.

For example, their preposterous statement that "low-level co-operation between Canadian intelligence and the CIA" led to the bombing of the Cuban trade mission in Montréal on April 4, 1972. The most charitable explanation is that the stories were concocted to make money.

The authors of these stories make no attempt to distinguish between a defensive and an offensive posture. They blithely equate "espionage" with the measures we take to secure ourselves against such things as international terrorism, espionage and subversive activities directed from abroad, and efforts to provide a secure Canadian government communications system (not something to be purchased off the shelves of some super-market).

Canada does not have an espionage service. Successive Canadian governments have made this clear. Therefore, such information or "intelligence" as we develop to cope with criminals, to preserve national security and to meet our various national needs and international obligations, is gathered by "passive" means from within our own borders.

To suggest that these efforts somehow are unworthy of Canada is ridiculous. Indeed, I would be surprised if most Canadians did not consider these efforts appropriate and necessary given the kind of world we have.

Canada has a legitimate, and sometimes urgent need for information to enable the government to make intelligent decisions in many areas. Most of the information we require comes to us through overt means, such as our representatives abroad and our participation in different international undertakings.

Some of the information we need, however, is not so easily acquired. Our defence forces, for example, are committed to NATO and NORAD. To carry out these roles and to formulate plans for various contingencies we need a great deal of information about the

military capabilities of many countries.

In NATO and NORAD we contribute to a common pool of information, and we draw from that pool in our planning at the international level and to satisfy national requirements. If Canada were neutral we would still need to be well-informed if we were to be able to deal effectively with threats to our national security. Even when we commit our forces to something like a UN peacekeeping effort we require information upon which to base decisions which could affect the safety and wellbeing of those forces.

Police forces in Canada, in addition to protecting society against criminal activity, also have a responsibility for detecting and countering espionage and subversive activities, and for dealing with some of the newer phenomena such as international terrorism in its various modes.

Much of the information needed to cope with criminal activity can be developed within Canada. However, criminal activity with international connections, espionage, and subversion can only be tackled effectively in co-operation with other countries. By definition these activities are covert, and to keep abreast of them requires extensive and continuing co-operation with many countries and a sharing of knowledge with them.

This we are able to achieve bilaterally and through our membership in organizations such as NATO, the Commonwealth and Interpol. Obviously the methods and the techniques used to acquire this kind of information and the information itself should not be made public.

One can imagine numerous other requirements for information which might not be easily obtained. For example, being able to satisfy ourselves that a bilateral agreement involving, say, the resale of Canadian military equipment or the provision of nuclear "know-how" was being properly observed. Or a need to know the nature and extent of foreign commercial and naval shipping activities in Canada's coastal waters.

It is quite inaccurate, of course, to claim that such activities are outside the control of ministers. In addition to normal budgetary and departmental machinery, ministers exercise a collective and continuing control over such activities. If they did not, they would be derelict in their responsibilities.

The authors of these stories make much of agencies such as the CIA. It would be

That's poppycock! STAT

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